

Weekly Bureau of Information for All Who Till the Soil or Are Interested in Making Homes

AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT

All inquiries and communications addressed to The Times-Dispatch will receive prompt attention. This department will appear each Monday, and contributions or suggestions will be welcomed.

ALFALFA IN OLD VIRGINIA: SOME OF ITS MANY USES

Aside from its value as a soil improver, there are three important places that alfalfa may occupy on the farm: Seeded alone as a hay crop, seeded alone as a pasture crop for hogs and under certain conditions for other classes of stock, and, when mixed with the grasses and clovers to make a pasture for all kinds of stock. Under soil conditions favorable for the growing of this crop, it is generally advisable to use alfalfa for all three of these purposes. A good stand of alfalfa may be expected to produce more hay than any of the grasses or clovers, and the annual risk and expense of seeding is largely done away with. Every general or stock farmer should seek additional information on the subject as a pasture for hogs. A Western man, writing about alfalfa, said: "A hog in an alfalfa field is sure to make a hog of himself," and this is certainly true.

On many farms a portion of the soil is only fairly well suited to the growing of alfalfa, besides some of the grasses should be seeded to produce a hay for horses, and to reduce the danger of bloatings when used for pasture, so that it does not seem practicable to devote all of the seeded area of the farm to alfalfa, as good as it is. Even under these conditions alfalfa, if seeded with some of the grasses and clovers, usually proves to be a very valuable part of the mixture. The seeding alone of a large acreage at the first attempt is not recommended, as the risk of failure is too great, and of the inexperienced grower is too great, but the alfalfa seed should be mixed with the regular seeding of clover, and should also be seeded alone on a small acreage, and this increased from year to year until the desired acreage is secured.

Alfalfa is a leguminous plant, and as such, adapted to grow on pastures, lawns, etc., and, like the clovers, to take its supply of nitrogen from the atmosphere. It thus improves the soil in the same way clover does. However, after the alfalfa has been seeded in the field for several years and the nitrogen content of the soil increased by the decay of roots, moults, stubble and leaves, the crop will feed on the nitrogen made from this course, and will take a smaller percentage of its nitrogen from the atmosphere. The alfalfa then does not do as much to build up the nitrogen content of the soil after it has been grown for several years in a field as it does during the first two or three years after seeding. It is, therefore, not advisable to leave one field seeded for an indefinite period of years, or as long as it produces satisfactorily, as is commonly done, but to seed a new field which needs building up, and to plow the old field, which should be in excellent condition to produce very satisfactory yields of corn and other crops.

Alfalfa makes an ideal pasture crop for hogs and poultry, and if properly managed, is satisfactory for horses, mules, sheep and cattle, and some farmers have had experience with bloating of cattle and sheep, as well as other classes of stock. The exact conditions which cause this trouble have not been well determined, but the danger appears to be the greatest when the growth is rankest, when no other feed is given to the stock, when the stock are turned in when hungry, and when they are allowed to eat all they want when the alfalfa is wet with dew or rain.

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crop, and the danger seems to be

over.

can easily get it without pulling the wool from the necks, and in feeding grain the sheep do not waste any, as they cannot eat their feet into it.

A rack sixteen feet long will accommodate twenty-five sheep without crowding, and can be filled with hay while the sheep are at the rack and no climb them up as is the result with other racks.

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